

STAT

Page Denied

STAT

EMIGRES DESCRIBE CONDITIONS IN HUNGARYHungaria

Munich, 11 Dec 1953

On 17 November 1953, a group of 197 Jewish emigres arrived at Naples en route from Hungary to Israel. The group left Budapest on 15 November, under an agreement concluded between Hungary and Israel in 1949 which permitted 5,000 Hungarian Jews to emigrate to Israel. Under this agreement the Hungarian government received, in 1949, 1,000 dollars per emigre or a total of 5 million dollars from the Joint Distribution Committee. This was the last group to leave Hungary under the agreement. It should have consisted of 210 persons to complete the quota of 5,000, but 13 persons were refused permission to leave Hungary at the last moment.

Each emigre was permitted to take out of Hungary 5 dollars, 200 forints, jewelry valued at 2,000 forints, and clothing representing 5,000 forints. All emigres were thoroughly searched at the border, and fountain pens, pencils, pocket knives, medicines, and even family photographs and prayer books were taken away from them.

According to the emigres, recently some improvement has been noticeable in Hungary, although the terror has not diminished. Slight but noticeable concessions have been made to the population, partly because of the alarming increase in sabotage committed by both peasants and workers. For example, the deportees [referring to mass deportations in May and June 1952] were [theoretically] permitted to return to their domiciles. Actually, however, this concession was nullified by a government decree published prior to the deportation, which provided that persons leaving Budapest would be permitted to return only after a lapse of 5 years. Consequently, any returning deportees were compelled to rent furnished rooms at exorbitant rates in the villages surrounding Budapest.

Most internment camps have been disbanded, and the use of the term "kulak" in the newspapers is diminishing. New trade licenses are being issued, largely to barbers and shoemakers, because many towns of several thousand inhabitants were previously without barbers and shoemakers.

A salary of 1,000 forints is considered very good in Hungary. Consumer goods are in plentiful supply, but the purchasing power of the population is extremely low. In the black market, one dollar is worth 40 forints. Gold objects are purchased at 25 forints per gram and sold at 100-120 forints per gram in the state stores. It is characteristic of the general impoverishment that 30-40 persons are usually standing in line in front of the pawnshops. The maximum amount of loan given in these shops is 500 forints, even if the object is worth a fortune.

Prices fell considerably in recent months; the prices for radio sets and motion-picture tickets, for example, were reduced by as much as 50 percent. The price reduction of the latter was undoubtedly due to the fact that the motion picture theaters show boring Russian films and are generally empty.

The population is deeply disturbed by news of the forthcoming new labor code. It is rumored that under the new law a wife will not be permitted to work if her husband earns more than 1,500 forints per month.

The most hated man in Hungary is Minister of the Interior Erno Gero. It appears that Gero has definitely won the fight with his old rival, Matyas

STAT

Rakosi. Gero's position appears so strong that he could afford to divorce his homely and old wife and to marry a pretty 20-year-old girl whose name has not been divulged.

According to the emigres, courage to live under the pervasive oppression is found only in wishful thinking. According to latest rumors, new disturbances will break out in East Germany during the next few weeks, and the American tanks will move in to re-establish order and will continue rolling until they reach Budapest. Public opinion has pinned its entire hope on President Eisenhower, and people are impatient with the British for antagonizing the President.

- E N D -

STAT

- 2 -